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C.I.A. and a Military Professional

After a bad stumble on the political ice with his failed effort to appoint Theodore Sorensen, President Carter now seeks to restore his balance by nominating an Annapolis classmate, Admiral Stansfield Turner, as Director of Central Intelligence. Admiral Turner's credentials appear, on first inspection, to be impressive. Still, the nomination raises a new question and leaves unanswered an old one.

The new concern is fundamental to the Director's most important responsibility: to provide the President and senior officials with intelligence that is independent, objective and truly central. That is, it must transcend the often parochial or rival perspectives of individual agencies, notably the Defense Department, which have intelligence arms of their own. Is it, thus, wise to ask a career military man to try to put aside the values and policy framework of a lifetime? Is it possible for such a man, even one of exemplary intellect and integrity, overnight to make himself independent and objective?

These are not mere rhetorical concerns. A leading intelligence analyst told the Senate Intelligence Committee last year that "military professionals tend to see military power as the prime determinant of the behavior of states and of the movement of events in international politics." Such generalized doubts are intensified during the present period of assessment of Soviet strategic and conventional forces.

Nevertheless, it seems wrong to argue that no military man should now be appointed to head the C.I.A. It is

hardly a departure. Five of the eleven men to hold the job were generals or admirals. Existing law protects against overweening military influence; at least one of the agency's top two officials must be a civilian. In any case, it is unjust to attribute stereotypical military views and attitudes to Admiral Turner before he has the chance to state his own.

The nomination of a military professional does create a burden for the President and the Admiral. It is insufficient simply to conclude that there is no necessary conflict between military background and intelligence objectivity. The Admiral's testimony, under questioning, can provide one form of reassurance about his sophistication and independence. He might be well advised to offer another, by volunteering to resign his commission and to pledge not to return to uniform.

The still-pending question about the nomination is more one for the President and Congress than for Admiral Turner. It concerns dirty tricks, operations to achieve short-term political advantage abroad through clandestine, perhaps illegal, even reprehensible means. We have applauded the standards outlined by Secretary Vance to insure that such operations be undertaken only in extraordinary circumstances—and then only with strict accountability, including that of the President. Admiral Turner presumably concurs in these standards. Nonetheless, their application should not be left to the discretion of transitory officials. Limits on dirty tricks must be engraved into the surer stone of statute.